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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

7626.5411/7-1158

**Memorandum of Conversation**  
**CONFIDENTIAL**

DATE: July 11, 1958

SUBJECT: United States Army Personnel Held in Soviet Zone of Germany

PARTICIPANTS: Ambassador Menshikov, Soviet Embassy  
Mr. Robert Murphy, Deputy Under Secretary *my*  
Mr. Anatoli G. Myshkov, Second Secretary, Soviet Embassy  
Mr. Charles G. Stefan, EE

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Mr. Murphy stated that we were still awaiting a Soviet response to the aide-memoire concerning the American helicopter and its crew in East Germany which had been handed to Soviet Charge Striganov by Mr. Herter on July 3, 1958. Mr. Murphy observed that public opinion in the United States is becoming increasingly concerned about the failure of the Soviet Government to honor its agreements and about the prolonged and unjustifiable detention of the crew of the U.S. Army helicopter held in East Germany. We cannot accept the patently erroneous contention of the Soviet Government, expressed in the Soviet note of July 2, that the Soviet authorities have no responsibility in this case. The United States Government continues to hold the Soviet Government responsible for seeing that the men are returned without further delay.

Mr. Murphy stated that the continued detention of the men and their prolonged separation from their families was inhumane. The attitude shown by the Soviet Government and by the local German authorities in the Soviet zone of Germany is difficult to reconcile with the frequent Soviet protestations of a desire for better understanding and a relaxation of tensions. Mr. Murphy then observed that we have noted the Soviet statement that arrangements for the return of the men and the helicopter should be discussed with the German authorities in the Soviet zone. However, we would like the Ambassador to remember the action already taken by American military authorities in Germany in this regard. The Commander-in-Chief of the Soviet forces in Germany had arranged a meeting between the competent American representative and the local German authorities, who were actually holding our men, in order to discuss arrangements for their return. The American representative had indicated his willingness to comply with all normal and reasonable requirements in arranging the release of our men. Mr. Murphy then pointed out that during the press conference organized by local

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-2-

German authorities on July 2 it clearly emerged that our men had originally been turned over by local German authorities to Soviet military authorities at a Soviet camp. Some of the men had even been interrogated by Soviet officers while in Soviet custody.

Mr. Murphy then stated that local German authorities of the Soviet zone have made it clear that they desire to extort some form of political ransom as a condition for the return of the men. Mr. Murphy stated that this was unacceptable to us. Mr. Murphy added that we fail to understand what the USSR expects to gain from a continuation of the present situation. On the one hand, the Soviet Government attempts to reject its responsibility for the return of the men. On the other hand, the Soviet Government permits the local German authorities of the Soviet zone to attempt to force us to pay a sort of blackmail for the return of the men. Mr. Murphy stated that we would like the Ambassador to know that a continuation of this situation can only worsen the relations of the Soviet Union and the United States to the benefit of neither country.

Ambassador Menshikov stated that he would inform the Foreign Ministry of Mr. Murphy's remarks. He noted that Mr. Murphy had stated that we fail to understand the Soviet position. The Ambassador stated that frankly he did not understand our attitude. He asserted that whether we liked it or not, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) is a sovereign state. Soviet troops were stationed in the GDR in accordance with an agreement between the USSR and the GDR and were not occupation troops. In the opinion of the Soviet side, all the questions connected with the return of the helicopter and its crew ought to be settled with the GDR. The Ambassador noted that Soviet authorities had helped American authorities establish contacts with the GDR because the United States did not maintain relations with the GDR. The Ambassador reiterated, however, that the only way to settle this issue was by direct negotiations with the GDR.

Mr. Murphy stated that the Soviets have agreements with us, which only recently the USSR had recognized by returning three American airmen to us. We, in turn, had recently returned one soldier to the Soviet Union. Suddenly the helicopter case arose and the Soviet Union, in effect, is asserting that it will not live up to the US-Soviet agreement covering this kind of case. Mr. Murphy asked the Ambassador if the Soviet Union has relinquished all of its rights under Four-Power agreements relating to Germany. The Ambassador responded that he did not know about these agreements, but that he was speaking about the agreements concluded between the USSR and the GDR. Mr. Murphy then asked the Ambassador if he thought that these agreements relieved the Soviet Union of the responsibilities which it had incurred under Four-Power agreements, including arrangements with respect to the status of Berlin. Ambassador Menshikov evaded a direct response to this query, and merely reiterated that the Soviet Government had no responsibility in connection with the return of the helicopter and its crew.

Mr. Murphy

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- 3 -

Mr. Murphy concluded by stating that the agreements the Soviet Union had concluded with East Germany were of no concern to the United States and had nothing to do with the current problem. Mr. Murphy said that we assume the Soviet Union would want to honor the earlier agreements with us, particularly if the Soviet Union is really interested in relaxing tensions between the United States and the USSR. He stressed that we look to the Soviet Union for action on this matter, and asked Ambassador Menshikov to make another effort to persuade his Government in this direction.

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